



Greer, S. (2020) Training for live art: process pedagogies and New Moves International's Winter Schools. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 11(2), pp. 214-228. (doi: [10.1080/19443927.2020.1748100](https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2020.1748100)).

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Deposited on: 29 April 2020

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Training for Live Art: process pedagogies and New Moves International's Winter Schools

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## **Training for Live Art: process pedagogies and New Moves International's Winter Schools**

Abstract:

New Moves International (NMI)'s Winter School was an annual programme of artist-led courses offering training and development for independent artists and students in tertiary education. Staged in Glasgow, UK, between 2003 and 2011, it emerged from NMI's commitment under the artistic directorship of Nikki Millican to fostering opportunities that might allow emergent and established practitioners to step outside their familiar creative process and critically assess their work. This essay offers a history of the Winter Schools and their significance to the development of Live Art in the UK during the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium. In doing so, it argues that the Winter School's emphasis on process-based pedagogies allows for further understanding of Live Art's resistant relationship to conventional forms of performer training, especially those characterised by 'masterclass' teaching.

Key words: Live Art; New Moves International; Goat Island; National Review of Live Art; experiential learning

The New Moves International (NMI) Winter School was an annual programme of artist-led courses and ‘professional skill development projects’ offered to emergent and experienced practitioners, independent artists and students in tertiary education working in Live Art and related practices. Programmed in Glasgow between 2003 and 2011 as part of the *New Territories* performance festival, which later incorporated the National Review of Live Art (NRLA), the Winter School’s contributing artists – including Goat Island, Richard Layzell, Geraldine Pilgrim, Franko B, Anne Seagrave, Ron Athey, La Pocha Nostra and Black Market International, amongst many others – represent many of the major figures of Live Art active before and since the turn of the millennium. This essay offers a partial history of the Winter School’s activities that situates its approaches to training for Live Art in an extended ecology of curation, commissioning and programming practices extending from NMI under the artistic directorship of producer and curator Nikki Millican. The school was the direct evolution of the organisation’s earlier Choreographic Core scheme developed in the mid-1990s to support artists working in contemporary dance, and running parallel to the Platform and later Elevator strands of the NRLA programme for emergent and early-career artists. This essay examines the particular significance of process to the Winter School’s Live Art pedagogies: as a creative strategy characterised by reflexive and collaborative forms of response, as an alternative to more output-oriented scholarly and technical skills-based study, and as a means to fostering new and alternative modes of creative praxis.

In doing so, this discussion considers the discourse of the Winter School – evidenced in course descriptions, marketing materials, artists’ own writing on their practice and participants’ recollections – in relation to claims concerning Live Art and Performance Art’s potential to resist ‘cultural conformity and domination by creating discourses and practices that are multicentric, participatory, indeterminate, interdisciplinary, reflexive, and

intercultural' (Garoian 1999, p. 10). If drama school and conservatoire performance training has been characterised by the mastery of an existing repertoire of skills, then the Winter School's emphasis on process over outcome suggests an alternative ethos attuned to – and perhaps prefacing – the Live Art Development Agency's framing of Live Art as a 'research engine driven by artists who are working across forms, contexts and spaces to open up new artistic models' (Keidan and Brine 2005, p. 74). This view involves a series of recurrent suppositions concerning Live Art's relationship to established arts practices and institutions. First is the belief that 'before anything else, the term 'Live Art' marks out a space for experimentation' (Kaye 1994, p.1) which involves less a break from theatre than 'a sustained and repeated investigation of its mechanisms' (Shalson 2012, p. 107). Second is the idea that Live Art's diversity of form expresses the desire 'to include cultural practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks' (Keidan 2004, p. 2). This thinking intersects with the perception that Live Artists have frequently been marginalised and misunderstood, the understanding that the study of Live Art is largely optional within most UK theatre and dance degrees (Alix 2013), and an awareness that Live Art has not enjoyed a high public profile in Scotland, even at the height of the NRLA's international reputation (Scottish Arts Council 2007, p. 50). Third is the assertion that Live Art in the UK has developed from a basis in the visual arts (Hoffmann 2009, pp. 101–2) and in resistant relation to drama school models of performer training. As the description for FrenchMatterhead's 2007 contribution to the Winter School would caution – if at least partially tongue-in-cheek – 'this course is not suitable for those who want to enhance their skills in performing on a stage' (New Moves International 2007).

Though the project of the Winter School can be understood as a product, contributor and critical response to these ideas – particularly in creating a space in which Live Art practices

were of central rather than marginal concern – it may also reframe our understanding of the broader field’s assumed outsider status. Bryant Keith Alexander has suggested that the paradigm of performance studies has the capacity to capitalise on the implication of ‘school’ within relations of power and social practice to reveal, interrogate and challenge ‘legitimated social forms of teaching, learning’ (Alexander 2006, p. 253), and knowing. The pre-eminent standing of both the Winter School and its contributors, though, may complicate such a claim, most especially when involvement in the programme formed a significant and even privileged point of access to the UK’s Live Art scene. In addressing that tension, this history identifies an investment in a model of laboratory training set at distance from the regular pressures and expectations of professional practice, in which experimental, experiential processes were privileged as a means of asking and answering open-ended questions, and through which workshop participants – established performance-makers, emergent artists, students, theatre academics and others – were invited to see themselves as peers. As I will explore in the latter part of this essay, the form of pedagogy at stake in the Winter School can be understood as extending beyond the basic premise of experiential learning – in which one ‘learns by doing’ through immersion in and reflection upon new experiences (see Lewis and Williams 1994) – to privilege relational modes of knowledge production, discovery and exchange in which the authority of singular, charismatic expertise is de-centered.

In working from a fragmentary history drawn from public-facing materials, the NRLA archive at the University of Bristol and the memories of participants, I am wary of assigning a singular narrative to the varied workshops that spanned the nine-year history of the Winter School. Though curated by Millican, the Winter School had no centralised syllabus and was not organised in relation to any external definition of quality assurance, assessment or learning outcomes that might characterise formal study within higher education. I am also

conscious of the gap that can exist between the intentions of a workshop outline or plan, and the actuality of practice in a room on a given day in response to a given group of participants. Nonetheless, the absence of a formal framework does not mean that the workshops which comprised the Winter School did not share or emerge from a common ethos. As Millican has suggested in interview, the Winter School was developed in the context of a broader curatorial project that sought to move away from fixed categories for performance-making – one that might give its participants ‘the confidence and expertise to go forward’ (Millican 2020, interview, 29 January).

### New Moves International and the Choreographic Core

NMI was founded by Millican in 1988 to produce *New Moves* – originally an annual season of international choreography – and the NRLA. Millican had brought the NRLA to Glasgow’s Third Eye Centre following the closure of Nottingham’s Midland Group Arts Centre, where the event was first known as *Performance Platform* (see Heddon *et al.* 2010). Millican locates this transition at a significant moment in Glasgow’s history, immediately prior to its year as European City of Culture in 1990 when works staged at Third Eye and in the city’s Mayfest programme – including George Wyllie’s *Straw Locomotive* (1987) suspended over the River Clyde – suggested the possibilities of support for cultural work beyond the mainstream. *New Moves* was also a response to what Millican perceived as a lack of experimentation in Glasgow’s dance scene at that time and to limited opportunities for the presentation of international work. Initially staged in the Third Eye’s studio space before expanding to venues across the city, *New Moves* was later renamed *New Moves Across Europe*, following Glasgow’s year as European City of Culture, and retitled again in 1998 as *new moves (new territories)* to ‘reflect new developments in choreography, dance and

movement-based performance' (New Territories 2004). This transition was completed in 2002 when the festival – then incorporating the *National Review of Live Art* in an expanded programme of contemporary and experimental performance work – became known as *New Territories* until its final year in 2011. During this period, NMI was primarily supported by funds allocated from the Scottish Arts Council (SAC)'s dance budgets – first as part of its 'core' portfolio of companies in receipt of substantial longer-term funding and then as a 'flexibly-funded' body following reorganisation of the SAC's grants infrastructure in the mid/late 2000s.

Appearing at the mid-point of this history, NMI's Winter School was developed as an evolution of its earlier Choreographic Core scheme, established in 1994/5 with the aim of aiding the professional development and international profile of Scotland's local, contemporary dance community through cultural exchanges, mentorship schemes, artist residencies and choreographic laboratories. Understood as 'a cornerstone of NMI and a key element in our partnership with young artists and the development of audiences for their work' (New Moves International 2001a), the Core's early ambitions were characterized by a reflexive responsiveness to the needs of its participants and the pursuit of collaborations that might extend the international horizons of those artists' careers. This involved the promise of support in the form of 'experience and constructive opinion' as well as in 'supplying anything from technical facilities to decent rehearsal space, equipped with sound and video' (New Moves International 2001a). It facilitated access to festivals, dance companies and other artists in Canada, Spain and Portugal, and, in its final year, coordinated a choreographic lab which brought together groups of Australian and Scottish/UK-based artists through intensive workshops in Adelaide and Glasgow. This work was extended through the longer-term involvement of mentors including Peter Boneham (artistic director of Le Group Danse

Lab, Canada), Tedd Robinson (artistic director of Canadian dance promotion and development organization 10 Gates Dancing) and Vicente Sáez (artistic director of Cia Vicente Sáez). The overarching project of the Choreographic Core, then, was attentive to the kinds of extended and distributed infrastructure of opportunity and material support that might be needed for the exhortation to be ‘brave enough to take creative risk’ (New Moves International 2001b) – as in the words of NMI’s contemporaneous artistic policy – to become a practicably accessible reality.

In contrast to the Winter School’s more open invitation to prospective participants discussed below, participation in the Core involved the deliberate selection of artists whose perceived ‘hunger to develop’ was characterised by a readiness to ‘stand back and reassess their work or be prepared to explore new ideas’ (New Moves International 2001a). While Core support was conceived as ‘reactive’ rather than ‘formulaic’, involvement in the scheme was nonetheless complemented by support to produce and stage new works, with Core members Andy Howitt, Tristan Borrer and Frank McConnel commissioned to present new works during *New Moves Across Europe*. In one of the scheme’s notable success stories, Colette Sadler’s involvement in the Core led to an invitation to join Cia Vicente Sáez, with whom she would tour internationally for three years (before later contributing her own solo show to the NRLA in 2004). This context of public presentation formed the backdrop rather than the primary goal of the Core, as NMI’s broader deployment of mentor and artist-in-residence programmes was distinguished by ‘a “laboratory” approach to training’ intended to allow artists ‘to step outside their familiar creative process and production cycle and critically, objectively assess their work’ (New Moves International 2001b). In this context, mentorships and residencies were understood as offering ‘a “safe” environment, offering constructive guidance and providing space/time to encourage risk without limitations and to allow failure’

(New Moves International 2001b), and without the pressure of having to realise a finished new work. This approach resonates with what Simon Murray and John Keefe note in their discussion of the expansion of workshop opportunities from the mid-1980s as part of a ‘widening culture of acceptance that professional training could and should be a continuous and recurring career-long experience’ alongside the belief that offering short courses or workshops could enable practitioners to ‘find breathing space to review and develop their own practice outside the relentless cycle of rehearsal, production, touring and grant applications’ (Murray and Keefe 2016, pp. 158–9).

Finally, the development of the Winter School programme can also be understood in the context of NMI’s links with the UK’s Higher Education sector and performance touring network, exemplified in the UK-wide Platform series begun in 1985 as a strand of the NRLA precursor *Eight Days: A Review of Live Art* staged at the Midland Group (Nottingham) and Zap Club (Brighton). Until 2003, this strand of the NRLA would provide a space for new and most often younger artists to show their work for a receptive audience, with selections for inclusion in the main festival made through satellite events around the country. This extended programme involved arts venues such as Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff), ICA (London), Green Room (Manchester) and Southampton Art Gallery as well as universities, HE colleges and art schools including Glasgow School of Art, Trent Polytechnic, Dublin’s National College of Art and Design, Dartington College of Art, Hull School of Art and Design, Duncan and Jordanstone College of the University of Dundee and Queen Mary University of London. As Jennie Klein has noted, artists who began their careers in the Platform programme include Curious (Helen Paris and Leslie Hill), Sam Rose, Richard DeDomenici, FrenchMottershead, Kate Stannard, Francesca Steele, Sheila Ghelani and Kira O’Reilly (Klein 2010, p. 55) –

many of whom would take part in or go on to lead Winter School workshops, or whose work would appear within the main NRLA programme.

### The early years of the Winter School

Previewing the 2003 *New Territories* festival programme, *The Herald's* theatre and performance critic Mary Brennan parsed the underlying logic of Millican's ambitions for the new Winter School: that NMI's commitment to a cultural 'cutting edge' necessarily involved 'introducing new artists and new work to audiences, but also by setting up opportunities for UK practitioners to explore ideas and techniques with outstanding creative forces from home and abroad' (Brennan 2003). Accordingly, each of the Winter School courses would offer 'a laboratory where participants will tackle a variety of set tasks and sudden improvisations designed to challenge their existing ways of working and thinking' (Brennan 2003).

For Millican, this necessitated the careful selection of participating mentors as 'not every artist is a good teacher. So I had to be really sure [as] the reputation of the Winter School relied on the quality of the teaching I was bringing into the city' (Millican 2020, interview, 29 January). In its first year, this comprised contributions from multimedia theatre company Forkbeard Fantasy, collaborative performance group Goat Island and – reflecting NMI's continued commitment to choreographic practice – dancers Helen Herbertson and Ben Cobham alongside Sarah Pearson and Patrick Widrig (the latter pair in residence at Dance Base, Edinburgh).

Framed as the festival's resident companies, the Winter School's contributing artists were also programmed in the main *New Territories* programme: a newly commissioned 'live installation event' from Forkbeard Fantasy, the UK premiere of Herbertson and Cobham's

*Morphia Series* and Goat Island's *It's An Earthquake In My Heart* (2001). Goat Island's workshop and performance was accompanied by a work-in-progress showing of what would become the company's eighth and penultimate show, *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy* (2004). Goat Island's involvement – continued in 2005 and 2008 – extended the company's longstanding relationship with Glasgow following their first summer school at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in 1996; Forkbeard Fantasy had previously been commissioned by Millican to create the street theatre show *The Red Strimmers* for 'Art In The Garden' at the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988; and Herbertson's work *Delirium* had previously been programmed during the *new moves (new territories)* festival in 2002.

Initially promoted to Live Art and academic mailing lists as a 'research, development and professional training programme for independent artists and students in tertiary education', individual workshops varied slightly in their description of who might take part – with Goat Island's sessions intended for 'professional and semi-professional artists' and Pearson and Widrig's workshop at Dancebase more narrowly 'open to professional dance artists in Scotland' (New Moves International 2002). Though none of the workshops had formal entry requirements– and, in the first year, were offered free of charge – involvement was mediated through an application process in which prospective students were invited to write a short statement 'that might include the following: education, training, influences, beliefs, aims and philosophy; your process/methodology; details of why you wish to participate in the Winter School with this company' (New Moves International 2003). As Millican offers, 'you had to be invited to join the Winter School, you couldn't just sign up... these were professional classes' (Millican 2020, interview, 29 January). The explicit identification of the Winter School as a space for artists working in Live Art emerged in the programme's publicity for its

second year, with a series of ‘professional skills development projects’ advertised as open to ‘both emergent and experienced practitioners, to independent artists and students in tertiary education’ (New Moves International 2004). Registration now carried a modest fee – ranging from £30 for a five-day workshop to £50 for a two-week course – though artists based in Scotland were encouraged to apply to the SAC’s Professional Development Fund for Individuals for assistance towards the costs of participating in any of the courses.

While the 2004 programme saw the introduction of an intensive career development course led by George Skalkogiannis (development director of Canadian dance company Daniel Leveillé Danse) intended for administrators and artists in focusing on business strategies for identifying ‘artist product’ and potential markets (New Moves International 2004), the remaining workshops were aligned with an exploratory laboratory model that would characterise the broader pedagogical ethos of the Winter School. Geraldine Pilgrim and Chahine Yavroyan’s course on ‘objects and atmospheres’, for example, was framed as intended for participants who were ‘interested in exploring, developing and creating site-specific environments as well as developing and creating narrative, often nonverbally through working with objects and atmospheres’. Richard Layzell’s course on ‘deprivation and overload’ – based on a DIY programme run by Arts Admin and LADA in London during the previous December – aimed to ‘give / share / experience ways of working / surviving / perceiving / thinking / organising / selling as a Live Artist in today's culture’ with the pursuit of a ‘strong group identity’ over the workshop period intended to create the possibility of ongoing contact and support between participants in the future. Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie’s interdisciplinary performance laboratory emphasised the potential of a workshop space for sharing work for critical feedback and mentoring: ‘This workshop is open to practitioners who make work and want a space to discuss and develop. This workshop is open to

performance practitioners whose work belies category and who delight in crossing disciplines’ (New Moves International 2004).

Though workshop publicity most often emphasised ‘practitioners’, this frame was interpreted broadly – with participants also including early career academics and postgraduate students undertaking research degrees in theatre and performance. For example, performance scholar Rachel Zerihan recalls attending Jamie McMurray and Alexander Del Re’s 2007 Winter School workshop – titled ‘Image, Body and the Other’ – after becoming familiar with McMurray’s work following a chance meeting at the PSi conference at Brown University in 2005. Engaged in a primarily desk-based, theoretical PhD project, Zerihan describes the workshop as having offered an opportunity to ‘step back into making work rather than just writing about it’ in a context that was characterised by a sense of an ‘allowance, an offering, saying “here’s the space to trust and explore”’ (Zerihan 2020, interview, 7 January).

### Process pedagogies

From its earliest years, the Winter School was characterised by a recurring claim on how a laboratory environment might operate at useful distance from the usual conditions of professional practice, conservatoire training and academic study – that is, at arms-length from conventional disciplinary judgments concerning skill, quality and product. In practice, this meant working with ‘no pressure on showing work in progress whatsoever – so a lot of it was behind closed doors’ (Millican 2020, interview, 29 January). In such a space, workshop participants were invited to re-orient their practice away from the pragmatic question of how to make new works towards a more open-ended exploration of creative praxis that might allow them to reconsider the terms and horizon of their own work. This dynamic is clearest in

the work of Goat Island, whose contributions to the Winter School programme (and in the work of their contemporaneous international summer schools) foregrounded the significance of process-based methodologies of creative response, and the collaborative pursuit of something ‘that “makes sense” but in a multi-voiced, polyphonic kind of way – coherent but not unified’ (Hixon in Bottoms and Goulsh 2007, p. 271). .[note]1

In the language of the *New Territories* 2003 festival programme’s extended discussion of Goat Island’s collaborative methods, they involved a desire to ‘work toward complexity rather than simplicity’, the invitation to accept that one cannot expect to ‘understand everything intellectually or rationally while creating’ and the premise of coming to rehearsals ‘with a fragment, not a completed idea’ (New Territories 2003 festival programme 2003). This approach may be exemplified in the group’s widely-appropriated exercise in which participants are invited to make a movement that illustrates an impossible task offered by another member of the group, such as drinking an ocean or watching the back of one’s head (Goat Island 1997, p. 10). This movement is simplified so it might be repeated and taught to others. One group then repeats the impossible task movement for the other participants – first very slowly, and then through a series of spatial configurations (against the wall, moving in line shoulder to shoulder, flat on your back). The objective of the exercises is not to complete the task or even approximate success but instead – as Bailes offers in discussion of the status of failure in the company’s work – to open ‘that which once appeared coherent and secure to the hazardous ruminations of unpredictability and incomprehensibility’ (Bailes 2011, p. 23) and thereby to prompt new unpredictable associations and possibilities.

The opportunity described by this approach was meaningful in different ways for different kinds of Winter School participant. A former student on the Royal Scottish Academy of

Music and Drama's Contemporary Theatre Practice (CTP) programme, theatre-maker Tashi Gore recalls the significance of being led 'through someone else's artistic process where I wasn't being marked, where it wasn't counting towards my degree' (Gore 2020, interview, 15 January). Working with the group at the city's Tramway venue (a large post-industrial space converted prior to Glasgow's year as European City of Culture) offered the opportunity to 'experiment with different ways of working, and [for] the outcome not to be to do with another piece that you were making, for it just to be its own' (Gore 2020). For theatre and performance scholar Deirdre Heddon, participation in that same year's Goat Island workshop was part of an ongoing and conscious commitment to professional development as an academic, following her appointment to a practice-based lectureship in Theatre Studies at the University of Exeter (Heddon 2020, interview, 13 January). Though drawn to the possibility of being 'inside the process', Heddon recalls a degree of self-consciousness in attending as an academic rather than as a student or as someone with an established performance practice, having at that point in her career been engaged in largely desk-based scholarship rather than practice-based pedagogy or research. In an unpublished journal kept during the Winter School, Heddon counsels herself to enjoy the process on its own terms: 'don't worry about impressing. Do this for you. It's not a competition. You do not need to impress the Goats or anyone else [...] the aim is to reflect on this process and learn from it' (Heddon 2003).

Though centred on her own experiences, Heddon's account also suggests the broader dynamics of a group comprised of students – primarily from RSAMD – as well as emergent and established artists including Anna Krzystek, Sandra Johnstone and Janice Parker. In describing an opening exercise, Heddon notes how two participants 'seemed to direct everything else, always talking together and referring/deferring to one another' with a third person 'always appealing to them for their opinion' (Heddon 2003). This hierarchy, though,

was disrupted by shifting configurations of the group across the second day's work and the rest of the week: three large 'research groups' leaving Tramway to explore sites across the city; pairs of participants then tasked with asking each other (indirect) questions about that space; followed by small group working to create and activate collaborative installations using information drawn from those interviews. A micro-lecture offered by Goat Island company member Bryan Saner contextualized these shifts as structural tools for navigating the collaborative and collective mind – a means by which to disconnect from your own ideas and allow other people to play with them: 'the structure enables that – it's the structure's responsibility' (Heddon 2003). Gore observes the influence of this approach on her own later approach to facilitation – both in seeding her appreciation of how structure might enable a creative process, and in inspiring an approach in her own teaching by which students are supported to 'unlock their creative processes by making performative responses to each other's sharings' (Gore 2020).

This embrace of collaborative process appears more forcefully in the workshop methodology of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes's *La Pocha Nostra*, founded in 1993 with Nola Mariano to give focus to Gómez-Peña's collaborations with other artists. Included in the 2008 Winter School programme alongside courses led by Marilyn Arsem and Rachel Rosenthal, *La Pocha Nostra's* ongoing 'conceptual lab of hybrid art and critical culture' – subtitled in Glasgow as 'an intensive community workshop on performance art as radical democracy' (New Territories 2008 festival programme 2008) – has emphasized the inseparability of personal, social and collective political goals, with instructors and participants working to 'collectively realise that we can negotiate political, gender, aesthetic, and spiritual differences' (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes 2011, p. 7). In Glasgow, the goal of grooming 'emerging – mid-career artists and cultural leaders and help[ing] them sharpen

their performance and analytical skill in dialogue with like-minded cultural rebels’ was offered alongside the possibility of exploring ‘new models for the relationship between artists and community, mentor and apprentice, that are neither colonial nor condescending’ (New Territories 2008 festival programme 2008). Appearing in extended form in Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes’s *Exercises for Rebel Artists* (2011) as a ‘mini-pedagogical manifesto’ sent to workshop participants in advance’ (2011, p. 10), these ambitions reflect La Pocha Nostra’s conception of performance as a mode of radical pedagogy which understands ‘the actual methodological process of developing original material’ to be the ‘most transformative and hopeful’ aspect of the group’s work (2011, p. 6). In plainer language, ‘the everyday process [of the workshop] IS the actual project’ (2011, p. 215).

These perspectives resonate with what Jonathan Heron and Nicholas Johnson have theorised as a ‘hopeful practice of laboratory exploration’, in which ensemble working ‘de-hierarchises a scholarly endeavour and recasts the student as co-creator of knowledge, rather than consumer of cultural capital’ (Heron and Johnson 2017, p. 282). Heron and Johnson invoke Phillip Zarrilli’s notion of the ‘metaphysical studio’ as ‘a place of erasure, of risk, of loss, and always, as anyone who steps on the stage knows, of potential failure’ (Zarrilli 2002, p. 161) to suggest the possibilities of a collective mode of enactive pedagogy in which different kinds of authority – as variously embodied by students, practitioners and academic scholars – might be negotiated and contested. Here, too, an emphasis on process free from the premise of a tangible outcome is significant: Zarrilli’s imagined studio is a ‘place of propositions, not givens; a place to practice dialectics, not ends or goals; a premise, not a decision; a possibility, not a fact’ (Zarrilli 2002, pp. 161–2). Such an ethos might be understood in turn as resistant of a ‘masterclass’ model of performer training in which ‘technical and interpretative knowledge are synthesised through the teacher’s personal authority’ (Atkinson

*et al.* 2013, p. 487) in exchanges in which a student's work is scrutinised by the teacher and an audience of other students, and where the 'successful' artistic interpretation or synthesis of particular techniques is gauged in relation to the exemplar offered by the master-teacher's own performance.

### Expertise

Nonetheless, the international renown and professional status of the Winter School's contributing artists – as well as the programme itself – formed a recurring part of the Winter School and festival's promotion to prospective students, the festival's audience and its presentation to funders and other partner organisations in the sector. This discourse is apparent in promotional emails, marketing and programme copy and reports (reproduced by the SAC/Creative Scotland in their own public-facing materials) through language which emphasised the longevity of contributing companies' practices ('For 28 years Forkbeard Fantasy has been extending and perfecting their unique mix of comic theatre, film, animated sets, gadgets, cartoons and visual trickery...'), called attention to artists' international profiles ('Having toured through the United States as well as to Brazil, England, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Scotland, South Korea, Switzerland and Wales...'), made recognition of scholarly attention ('...he has been the subject of two monographs...'), awards or prestigious commissions, or reiterated what was understood to be common knowledge ('Raimund Hoghe is widely regarded as the "father of European performance and contemporary dance"'). Part of the appeal and promise of the Winter School's artist-led approach to professional development was clearly that one might have the opportunity to work with established and highly-respected figures from the expanded field of Live Art – to learn from 'real' artists, to gain access to networks of opportunity, and to initiate

collaborations or more lasting mentorships. This reality is born out in the recollections of workshop participants who suggest how the reputation of individual artists and the Winter School as a whole served as a hallmark of quality: in Zerihan's words, 'because of its affiliation with the NRLA, you knew that [the Winter School] was going to be strong and take things seriously' (2020).

This does not mean, though, that formative encounters between contributing artists and workshop participants were premised on straightforwardly sympathetic approaches to making or understanding performance. Artist and lecturer Nathan Walker describes taking part in a workshop run by Jürgen Fritz and Jamie McMurray at a moment when the action, durational and task-based practices that interested him were not commonly taught in the UK. Though drawn to the Winter School by the profile of Fritz and McMurray's practice – and the reputation of Black Market International, of which Fritz is a member – Walker recalls 'disagreeing with a lot of the ways in which [Fritz] taught in that workshop. [...] His approach or philosophy is based on images, and I don't subscribe to that in my practice, and I was trying to move away from making images towards performing tasks' (Walker 2020, interview, 14 January). For Walker, then, the Winter School experience served to clarify the terms of his own interests, with Fritz's claim that 'performance artists can't use their voice' informing the trajectory of a following decade of research and practice centred on sound, voice and speech. The broader space of the workshop, though, was one in which he recalls the significance of experimenting without the expectation of a concrete outcome: 'I can't remember any other experience in a workshop or in higher education where I was given that space to repeatedly test things out' (Walker 2020).

Conversely, theatre maker and director Jenna Watt recalls her participation in Ron Athey's Winter School course in 2009 as a response to audiences viewing some of her early work as 'cute' or 'whimsical' and a disinterest in making work that prompted that response: 'It wasn't the kind of artist I wanted to be' (Watt 2020, personal communication, 7 January). Though Watt's work did not involve performance actions such as body modification, abjection, piercing or blood-letting, she had valued and been drawn to this type of work at the NRLA, and saw the opportunity to work with Athey as a means to developing her own practice in a new direction. While Watt remembers feeling 'utterly lost and like an absolute imposter' for her lack of interest in working with the explicit body in the same manner as other workshop participants, she attributes Athey's advice in a private meeting to 'find her fierce' as ultimately changing her entire approach to making work. This saw Watt engage with risk and violence more sincerely in her later performances – both literally in the case of the 'apple smashing piece' that saw her banned from performing at the Arches venue (Fisher 2016) and more figuratively in her Scotsman Fringe First winning show *Flâneurs* (2012), which concerned the 'bystander effect' in the aftermath of a friend's street-mugging.

### Legacy

After the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the NRLA in 2010, Millican took the decision to retire the event and developed a new programme strand titled *This Is Performance Art* (TIPA) for 2011. Initially intended as a three-year programme exploring the history of performance around the world, the first instalment focused on European artists – perhaps at least in part because of NMI's involvement in the pan-European, EU-funded *A Place For Live Art* project which ran between 2008 and 2013. Through this evolution, the Winter School continued as an engine for development aligned with and extending through the ecology of *New Territories'* main

programme. For example, dancer and choreographer Jack Webb's programme entry for *The Bravest Thing You Can Do Is Be Still*, presented as part of the 'small dances / BIG IDEAS' strand of new works that were 'big on ambition but small in scale and budget', noted that the work was partially created during a *New Territories* school with Peter Boneham in 2009 (New Moves International 2011). That same year saw the launch of the Athena programme, a new mentorship scheme for graduates from RSAMD's Contemporary Performance Practice programme; *Into The New*, RSAMD's (still-ongoing) showcase of student and graduate work appeared as an extension of the main festival programme for the second year. The 2011 edition, though, would become the final Winter School as the following year's programme – planned to involve Forkbeard Fantasy, La Pocha Nostra, Rosemary Butcher and FrenchMottershead – was cancelled when the discovery of 'financial irregularities' forced NMI's sudden closure (Dibdin 2011).

Nonetheless, the close association of NMI's Winter School and RSAMD – where timetabled classes were arranged to allow students on the CTP and later Contemporary Performance Practice programmes leave to attend workshops – offers further evidence of the Winter School's legacy in enabling its participants to identify the terms of their own future development. Arts facilitator Jodie Wilkinson, for example, recalls her perception that the Winter School offered an opportunity to 'start investing more energy not only into my own practice but working and making connections with other people' by engaging with artists from outside of Glasgow and beyond the intensive 'bubble' of a degree experience at RSAMD, where she had worked with the same relatively small cohort for four years. Connections made through the Winter School opened the door to later work and other networking opportunities: travelling to London to take part in Devoted and Disgruntled's conversation events about theatre and, the following year, working for the NRLA providing

production support for Black Market International. Moreover, Wilkinson describes having reached a moment where she knew she wanted her practice ‘to be involved in making something meaningful, in engaging with people. [...] I wasn’t one of those artists in Live Art whose work in some respects was quite violent in [staging] abrasive experiences. I didn’t enjoy that as much. I didn’t see where the conversation could start’ (Wilkinson 2020, interview, 13 January). Lone Twin’s contribution in 2005 of a workshop ‘on performance and kindness’ seemed to offer an alternative approach: they were ‘not just putting on something that was kind in nature – they wanted to work with kindness, and that made a lot of sense’ (Wilkinson 2020). This approach – and its validation – travelled with Wilkinson into later projects, where she cites the influence of Lone Twin’s outlook in shaping her contribution to Nic Green’s *Trilogy* (2010) alongside Laura Bradshaw, Murray Wason and Louise Brodie.

Tashi Gore (whose experiences with Goat Island are noted above) similarly cites the Winter School’s influence on the development of her later practice as a facilitator and performance maker – for example, in recalling an exercise led by Raimund Hoghe in which everyone was invited to bring a piece of music into the room, with the group sitting still and watching each person in turn listening to their chosen track: ‘And now I think back and my whole practice is built on people being themselves on stage [laughter] and I think, wow, obviously I loved that... because I absolutely loved watching people listening to the pieces of music that moved them’ (Gore 2020). Now co-artistic director of award-winning theatre company Glass (collaborating with fellow CTP graduate and workshop-attendee Jess Thorpe), Gore also suggests the significance of how ‘being introduced to an artist who wasn’t already in the Scottish community [and] to international artists who didn’t know you’ meant that ‘you could be whoever you wanted to be, for that week’ (Gore 2020). For Gore, then, the Winter School’s provision of a space outside of the framework of assessment was also one which

enabled its student participants to better (re)imagine the kinds of artists they might become in later professional practice.

While Live Art in Scotland during the late 1990s and early-to-mid 2000s might be conceptualised as a ‘spoked wheel’ with the NRLA at its centre (Scottish Arts Council 2007, p. 37), the Winter School’s role in providing training, development and networking opportunities for established and emergent practitioners allows us to reconceptualise that landscape as an ecology of opportunity, curation and development – and, moreover, to better recognise the contribution of NMI and Millican to the development of the sector in Britain as a whole. At the same time, the Winter School’s emergence from NMI’s earlier Choreographic Core project signposts the significance to Live Art of developmental spaces which operate at arm’s length from conventional expectations and obligations (whether as a student or as someone with an established practice) and which foreground process as an end in itself. This emphasis on process also allows us to apprehend that training for Live Art might be most simply understood as a mode of commitment – that is, an ongoing effort of exploration rather than the task of internalising and reproducing a known repertoire of skills. That commitment, though, involves a willingness to work without the certainty of a known outcome. At stake here, then, is a mode of training which seeks the conditions in which participants might discover their own opportunities for self-development and self-definition. In this dynamic, the expertise of the Live Art instructor rests in their capacity to frame or draw on instances of their own practice as a starting point for experiential strategies of creative synthesis and further exploration.

Notes

1 The Goat Island summer schools - directed by the members of Goat Island - were established in 1996 with the aim of providing an opportunity for artists to work and study together in developing new theories and practices in art/performance. Originated at Glasgow's CCA through funding from Arts Council England, the Scottish Arts Council and Glasgow City Council, later schools were held in Bristol and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. See <http://www.goatlandperformance.org/education.htm> [Accessed 8 Feb 2020].

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